

Cowl, (W. Y.)

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

ON THE

WORK OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY

FOR

Medico - Scientific Investigation,

BY



WALTER Y. COWL, M. D.

January 4th, 1887.

WITH A LIST OF DONORS TO THE LIBRARY OF
THE SOCIETY.

At the meeting of the Society, January 4th, 1887, it was
Resolved : "That the President's Address be published together
with a copy of the 'Donors' List' of the Library, either in some
journal or in pamphlet form."



THE WORK OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR MEDICO-
SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION.*

GENTLEMEN :—In greeting you at the beginning of a new year, I need hardly express to you my sense of the honor of the chair to which you have called me, nor the responsibility which its acceptance implies.

You are all familiar with the manner in which the presidency of this Society has been fulfilled in the past, and naturally look forward to a continuation of the same in the future. Whilst conveying to you then my appreciation of this office, of your friendship and of the duties which these impose, let me briefly scan the horizon about us and sum up the work in hand.

In doing this, it will be well to note again the position that we hold, and the place that we hope to occupy, for at the present time there is a very evident spirit of change in some of the oldest and most staid of medical societies, which is unsettling their notions of medicine, and making great alterations in the mode of practice of their members.

I do not need to specify the change in attitude on the part of the Old School of Medicine towards Homœopathy and its practitioners ; for it is, indeed, but yesterday, that we found our allopathic brethren quite indifferent or antagonistic, often fiercely so, while to-day they grasp our hand, in private, and are endeavoring, though covertly and feebly, to practice by our therapeutics. To-morrow, we expect them to shake off the shame of having so long ignored the truth, sufficiently at least to greet homœopathy and homœopathists in a regular and manly fashion.

These changes in a matter so fundamental as the actual treatment of disease, convince us that we are passing through an epoch, when the new wine of specific medicine is working in the old bottles of allopathy, and soon about to crack them ; a period, when in prescribing for the patient, instead of reasoning from certain pathological states assumed to be present, to certain theories of the action of drugs in disease, our old-school brethren are coming to simply apply a remedy which has produced in the

* An Address delivered before the Society, January 4th, 1887, by the incoming President, Dr. W. Y. Cowl.

healthy *similar symptoms* to those observed in the patient, thus getting rid of theories of disease, theories of drug action and other sources of fallacy, which continually present themselves anew as pathology and the views of the operation of medicines from time to time alter. In other words, substituting specific medication for the actual symptoms instead of drugs prescribed upon a process of reasoning from a conception of the nature of a patient's disease to a conception of the action of a remedy in such a condition.

Entering thus a crisis when the old views of therapeutics are about to be seriously shaken in the minds of the majority, it is easy to perceive that influences, comparatively small, may exert a considerable effect.

At this juncture then, and during this upturning of the general mind toward the position, which we hold and which has been so long, so stoutly, and so successfully held by our predecessors, as practitioners of a scientific therapeutics, it becomes our duty to continue to sound the note that this Society struck when it began; namely, the harmony of homœopathy and scientific investigation in medicine, for it is this which is the mainspring of our action. Thus speaking, our voice has no uncertainty, and our work emphasizes our idea.

But let us turn back for a little, and see what has already been accomplished in accordance with our purpose. Starting three years since with less than a dozen members, the first considerable work undertaken by the Society was the formation of a library of reference for the use of the profession, a library to contain especially those works on medicine that pertain to the homœopathic treatment of disease.

There is now, in this city, as you are aware, no other such collection open to the student and practitioner, and the want of this first of all aids to research, is practically denied to those who have the time, the disposition, or the incentives to original work in our field of medicine.

This want has not, however, been of a long existence, for in former years, the free use of the large and very complete library of homœopathic medicine begun by Dr. John T. Smith, the late pharmacist, and continued by his son and successor, Dr. Henry M. Smith, was at the command of the profession. But, owing to the exigencies of business, this provision has ceased, and for several years before our present collection was begun, students perfecting their graduation theses, young practitioners endeavoring to gather proof for some new idea in therapeutics, physicians wishing to establish some point in controversy, were all compelled to possess of themselves, or to seek the loan of whatever was needed of our literature for their present purposes.

Now, it is needless to say, that we have not yet met this want; but we have begun to fill it. A nucleus contributed by the members of the

Society has been constantly added to by gifts from others. The results of our appeals, individual and collective, to our fellow-homœopathists have been generous.

There have been received in all over two thousand volumes, which have been duly credited to their donors and arranged upon our shelves. Amongst these books are many of the early and more valuable works on homœopathy now scarce or out of print. We likewise possess files complete and nearly complete, of the more prominent medical journals of both schools of therapeutics. The number of works on general medicine is also considerable.

In addition to these we have received many duplicates, more particularly of periodicals. These have already been of no little value by way of exchange with other libraries, notably that of the Surgeon General's office at Washington. It is to be expected that this part of our collections will enable us to secure valuable material from libraries or societies or individual physicians who may wish to fill out incomplete sets of periodicals.

But our main dependence must be placed upon those whom we may interest in this work. We want of them, whatever books and pamphlets they do not feel much use for, and we offer in return all the privileges that our means from time to time afford. At the present these consist simply in the free use of the library for reference. Besides this, it is our practice to render full credit for all gifts received, and in addition to the acknowledgement of the librarian to the donor, the name of the latter is placed upon the Chronological List of Donors to the Library, together with the sum total of his gifts of books and pamphlets to date.

Now, in order that those of the profession who have not yet contributed to our collection, as well as those who might wish to increase their donations, may see the names and the figures, I would suggest that this list be engrossed and exposed in the rooms of the Society. In addition to this it may be considered whether it be expedient to elect to honorary or corresponding membership such contributors as shall make large donations to the library, either at once or altogether.

With the expectation of further bequests, however, it is become a matter for your determination, whether the Society shall remove to more commodious quarters. All the available space for books in the rooms which we occupy by the courtesy of the management of the Ophthalmic Hospital, is now occupied.

The large cases given by the Hon. Cornelius O'Reilly, are filled with books, and further accessions cannot be placed in order until the Society shall decide to remove and assume a continuous expense for rent.

It is for you to decide whether with our present membership, which although rapidly growing, is not yet large, it will be best to leave our present abode, which is known to every one, frequented by many students and practitioners who have use for works of reference, easily accessible, and in all other respects satisfactory, or on the other hand do as did librarian Panelli of the British Museum, who spent his life not over his books, but in acquiring the vast stores of material which now fill the cellars of that institution and call loudly for a place to be exhibited. We may then, whilst making all possible use of what we have, wait until our riches increase and devote our energies chiefly to securing the stores that now lie fallow abroad and constantly diminishing by the hand of time.

At the present moment, owing to the energy and faithfulness of our past librarians, the books we have accumulated are all entered in a well ordered card catalogue and are convenient of reference.

Our meetings held on the first Tuesday in each month, except July and August, are open to the profession, and during the past year have greatly increased in size. The membership, which has materially augmented, has drawn recruits from amongst those long established in practice as well as from younger members of the profession.

As stated by the Secretary in his last annual report, there have been several papers of general or special interest read at each of the meetings, and a number of original communications have been made. With reference to the latter and others like them of former years, I would submit to you the propriety of considering such original matter as belonging to the special archives of the Society intended for publication as may be provided for by the Society. It is manifest that the quantity of valuable records brought before us is too great to publish on our own account as yet, more especially as the prominent journals have requested such matter. Were all the papers read before us, however, to be immediately published in the latter way, it could not fail to be of general advantage, while provision could be made for the publication of original communications *seriatim*. These latter then, together with the library, would be the enduring edifice of the Society.

With reference to work outside of efforts for the acquisition of books, I have no suggestions at present to make, for we cannot expect, being in reality a band of New York business men, to undertake any considerable concerted investigation in medical science, nevertheless we may individually, as in the past, bring those matters in which we have special interest, or to which we are devoting especial attention, before our fellows, and keep alive the spirit of scientific investigation, which is the cause of our existence.

In endeavoring to assist you in this, I trust that my efforts may approach in fruit the administrations of my predecessors, and I simply, therefore, bespeak your indulgence and aid in fulfilling the duties that belong to this chair.

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